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Official Welcome of His Excellency Eugene A. Marino, S.S.J.

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OFFICIAL WELCOME*

THE MOST REVEREND EUGENE A. MARINO, S.S.J.
Auxiliary Bishop of Washington

*The address given below was delivered by Bishop Marino as the Homily for the Concelebrated Holy Mass on the afternoon of the first day of the Thirty-Fifth National Convention of the Mariological Society of America.

Dear Friends in Christ,

I take great delight in welcoming you, the members of the Mariological Society of America, in the name of Archbishop Hickey to the Archdiocese of Washington. It was here, some thirty-five years ago, that the Mariological Society began its work of contributing both to the advancement of scientific theology as well as to the pastoral mission of the Church. I come before you today, not to offer a scientific, theological treatise; I come as a pastor and teacher of the Church who believes that the life, worship and mission of the Church cannot be understood apart from Mary. I come in the context of a Liturgy to give thanks to the Triune God, whose redeeming love, manifested on the cross, gave to us so great a Mother.

No one knows better than yourselves the remarkable developments which the past thirty-five years have witnessed. How frequently and with what solemnity that magisterium of the Church has spoken of the Virgin Mother of God. In 1950, Pope Pius XII infallibly defined the doctrine of the bodily Assumption of Our Lady into heaven. The Fathers of the Second Vatican Council, guided by the Holy Spirit, spoke of Mary's unique and indispensable role in the mystery of salvation; they saw in the Virgin Mother of God an eminent and singular exemplar of the Church, who has given birth to all those baptized in Christ and instructed them with Word of God uncontaminated by error. So

frequently, the unforgettable Pope Paul VI spoke of Mary as the New Eve and Mother of the Church, and encouraged us to intensify our devotion to Mary. Most recently, as the Holy Year was drawing to a close, Pope John Paul II, conscious of the indignity, threats and suffering which so many people experience in the modern life, rededicated the entire world to the Immaculate Heart of Mary.

At the same time, there has been a notable and even astonishing decline in appreciation of Marian doctrine and devotions. Often this decline is attributed to an exaggerated Marian piety which is thought to have obscured the primacy of the Liturgy in Catholic life and worship. Doubtless, we are all ready and willing to heed the Council's teaching that extraliturgical devotions are not to overwhelm or supplant the mysteries which the Church celebrates in the Liturgy; instead, popular devotions are to draw their life and strength precisely from the Liturgy. This teaching, however, is frequently misinterpreted to mean that most extraliturgical piety, including Marian piety, is defective or in some way "anti-liturgical." Such a statement betokens a misunderstanding of several things: first, the nature of the liturgy; second, the relationship between liturgy and doctrine; and third, the indispensability of Marian doctrines. It is of these points that I wish to speak for a few moments.

The Liturgy has been called "the source and summit" of the Church's life. It is the central activity of the Church, and it is for the celebration of the Eucharist that the Church exists. It is the Eucharist which also continually creates the Church anew—*ecclesia semper creanda*, as the saying goes. If both clergy and laity properly appreciate the Liturgy, they understand that the Liturgy, in the first and most basic instance, is not something they do for themselves, or for God. The Liturgy, on the contrary, is comprised of the great and marvelous deeds which the Incarnate Son of God has accomplished "for us and for our redemption." There can be no question of "celebrating ourselves" when we come before the all-holy and life-giving Trinity in need of redeeming and purifying love. There can be no question of our offering to God truly spiritual worship in our bodies, apart from the sacrifice of praise which the Eternal Priest offered to the Fa-

ther on the cross. In the Liturgy, the saving deeds of God are rendered truly present and accessible to us. We enter into the paschal mystery, re-presented to us on the altar, so that we might die to sin and rise to new and everlasting life. Only because the Lord has first done marvelous deeds for us, can we offer fitting and acceptable worship. The whole rhythm and logic of the Church's worship, follows the pattern set forth in Mary's hymn of praise, *The Magnificat*: "The Lord has done great things for me; holy is His name." The saving initiative belongs to the Father of mercies; the desire to give thanks is itself also a divine gift! Mary, the unexcelled model of the Church, is a living liturgy. She who prays with us and for us, is also the pattern of our prayer. To say *a priori* that Marian devotions are "anti-liturgical" is to delay the time when the whole People of God will understand that the Liturgy seeks nothing other than the birth of Christ in us!

Similarly, the opinion that Marian devotions are contrary to the spirit of the Liturgy fails to see the indissoluble bond between liturgy and doctrine. From ancient times, the Church has always seen the Liturgy as the living expression of her faith. The Scriptures are most the Word of God when they are proclaimed in the context of the Liturgy. The prayers of the Liturgy are suffused with the faith of the Church, so much so that Pope Pius XI was prompted to say that "the Liturgy is the chief organ of the ordinary magisterium of the Church." In our day, as in the earliest days of the Church's existence, "the law of believing is the law of praying" — *lex orandi est lex credendi*.

We have all witnessed the damage which occurs when attempts are made to cut the Liturgy from the moorings of doctrine. At best, the Liturgy, under the guise of being liberated from narrow strictures, is set aimlessly adrift in a sea of conflicting opinion. At worst, the Liturgy, when divorced from its doctrinal basis, threatens to degenerate into idolatry. This divorce not only eviscerates the Liturgy, but also reduces doctrine, as well as all attempts to systematize it, to dry and lifeless speculation.

Mary, the Mother of God, steers the Church away from this fatal course. As the Second Vatican Council taught, "having en-

tered deeply into the history of salvation, Mary, in a way, unites in her person and re-echoes the most important doctrines of the faith. . . ." In the same spirit, the Synod of Bishops acclaimed Mary as "a living catechism." In Mary, whose song of praise echoes across the centuries, we recover the link between liturgy and doctrine.

The link between liturgy and doctrine demands a further consideration. As pastor and teacher, I am concerned whenever I hear the opinion advanced that educated Catholics are free to pick and choose among the Church's teachings; not all of them, it is said, need to be embraced. I believe it is not coincidental that the teachings which many think they can safely jettison are those which pertain to Mary's freedom from sin as well as those which pertain to personal morality. These two sets of teachings are bound together.

I need not defend the bond which exists between Marian doctrines and all other doctrines of the faith. I simply repeat Pope Paul's teaching that Mary is "joined by a close and indissoluble bond to the mysteries of the Incarnation and Redemption." The denial of Marian doctrine imperils not obscure points of faith, but Catholicism itself. It also imperils the link between doctrine, prayer and ethics. Only in Mary, the first of those redeemed by Christ, are these three dimensions of discipleship perfectly integrated. In her, the whole sum of revelation found perfect repose; from her being, there came forth in Christ perfect praise; and in her thought and action, the Word of God found perfect obedience. Mary is the living link between doctrine, ethics and spirituality.

It is precisely these dimensions which must be reunified if the renewal of the Church is to be genuine and lasting. Liturgy and doctrine have, as their proper outcome, a life which can be described as "a living sacrifice of praise." It is this life which the Church, as a priestly people, is to offer the Lord of History and the King of Creation. To neglect or deny the importance of Marian doctrines is to retard the proper integration of these three interdependent aspects of Christian existence.

My brothers and sisters: we have drawn near to the Lord's altar, where we are fed on the banquet of Christ's sacrifice and

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dare to call God our Father. We dare to address God as our Father, because we have the Church as our Mother. We are indeed a pilgrim people, who depend completely on the sacrificial love and the consolation we have found in the Church as we make our way through this valley of tears. We cannot forget Mary, because the life and worship of the Church has enabled us to see her as our celestial Mother. We have learned to say with our brothers in the East, “. . . O Mother, radiant and all beautiful, Mother of sorrows, born on the Cross, you who give birth on the Cross, Mother of innumerable children, how sweet it is to meet you!” (Cf. André Martin, *Les Croyants en U.R.S.S.*, Paris: Fayard, 1970.)